

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L PANAMA 6802

EO 11652: GDS

TAGS: OCON, OAS, PN

SUBJ: THE QUITO MFM - THE PERSPECTIVE FROM PANAMA

REF: STATE 252031

SUMMARY: PANAMA HAS FOR SOME CONSIDERABLE TIME HAD LITTLE USE FOR THE OAS, AN ATTITUDE WHICH HAS BEEN REFLECTED IN THE LOCAL MEDIA'S COVERAGE OF AND REACTION TO THE QUITO MFM. WHILE EDITORIAL COMMENTARY HAS RANGED FROM PETULANT TO OCCASIONALLY THOUGHTFUL, THE PREDOMINANT TONE HAS BEEN CRITICAL - OF THE OAS AS AN INSTITUTION AND OF THE U.S. ON THE CUBAN ISSUE - AND THE PRINCIPAL THEME THAT LATIN AMERICA'S INTERESTS CAN BEST BE SERVED THROUGH A HEMISPHERIC ORGANIZATION WITHOUT THE OVERWHELMING INFLUENCE OF THE UNITED STATES. GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS, FOR THEIR PART, HAVE AVOIDED PUBLIC STATEMENTS AND, IN PRIVATE, HAVE EXPRESSED A "WHAT-ELSE-COULD-YOU-EXPECT" REACTION. ALL OF THIS IS A FURTHER INDICATION THAT, WHILE PANAMA WILL PERSIST IN ITS ANIMOSITY TO THE PRESENT OAS, THE GOP HAS NO INTENTION OF ALLOWING THE OAS' MISERIES TO INTERFERE WITH THE TRATY NEGOTIATIONS NOW IN PROGRESS. END SUMMARY.

1. MEDIA COVERAGE OF THE QUITO MFM - BEFORE,DURING AND AFTER - WAS EXTENSIVE AND EDITORIAL COMMENTARY ABUNDANT (SEE USIS MEDIA REACTION SERIES). WHILE THE DEFEAT OF THE
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CUBAN SANCTIONS INITIATIVE WAS ROUNDLY DENOUNCED - AND

BLAMED ON THE U.S. - IT WAS THE BROADER ISSUE OF U.S. HEGEMONY IN THE OAS WHICH TENDED TO EMERGE AS THE PRINCIPAL THEME OF THE GOVERNMENT-CONTROLLED MEDIA'S COMMENTATORS. THIS EDITORIAL TACK WAS CLEARLY EVIDENT IN MATUTINO ON NOVEMBER 18 AND EL PANAMA AMERICA AND MATUTINO ON NOVEMBER 20 AND 21, ALL OF WHICH DECRIED U.S. MONOPOLY OF THE OAS, PRONOUNCED THE ORGANIZATION'S OBITUARY, AND - LOOKING BEYOND QUITO AND THE OAS - CALLED FOR A TRULY LATIN AMERICAN ORGANIZATION WITHOUT THE OVERWHELMING AND CONTROLLING INFLUENCE OF THE UNITED STATES.

2. GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS, SINCE FOREIGN MINISTER TACK'S RETURN, HAVE ESCHEWED PUBLIC STATEMENTS ON THE QUITO MEETING. TACK'S REMARK WHILE IN QUITO THAT THE ONLY "WINNER" HAD BEEN CUBA PROBABLY ACCURATELY REFLECTS THE CONSENSUS OF GOP OPINION. IN PRIVATE, A FOREIGN MINISTRY OFFICIAL NOTED, WITH SOME SARCASM, THAT THE OUTCOME AT QUITO WAS SIMPLY WHAT HE AND HIS COLLEAGUES HAD EXPECTED.

3. COMMENT: AS IT DID FOLLOWING THE AUGUST ANNOUNCEMENT OF THE RE-ESTABLISHMENT OF RELATIONS WITH CUBA, THE GOP HAS ALLOWED THE MEDIA TO EXPOUND ON THE QUITO MFM WHILE ITSELF MAINTAINING A SOMEWHAT DETACHED SILENCE. WE SEE IN THIS YET ANOTHER INDICATION THAT WHILE THE GOP IS COMMITTED IN ITS DISLIKE OF THE OAS, IT HAS NO INTENTION OF PERMITTING THE AGONIES OF THE OAS TO IMPACT ON THE POSITIVE CLIMATE FOR AND SUBSTANTIAL PROGRESS IN THE CURRENT CANAL TREATY NEGOTIATIONS. IT ALSO MEANS, IN OUR JUDGMENT, THAT PANAMA WILL CONTINUE TO EXPLORE THE "NEW DIALOGUE" WITHOUT UNDUE REGARD TO QUITO. THE PRINCIPAL POST-QUITO QUESTION, AS FORESEEN IN REFTEL, IS THE MATTER OF U.S. LEGISLATIVE SANCTIONS WHICH WOULD BE ACTIVATED BY PANAMANIAN FLAG TRADE WITH CUBA. WERE SUCH TRADE TO COMMENCE - AND SANCTIONS APPLIED - THE IMPACT ON THE NEGOTIATIONS WOULD BE NEGATIVE INDEED.
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